
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

600 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, DC
(202) 637-7000

Testimony of
**Dave Kubicek, Acting Deputy General Manager
Operations**

***Snow Disasters for Local, State, and Federal Governments in the
National Capital Region: Response and Recovery Partnerships with
FEMA***

Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and
Emergency Management of the Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure

**Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton, Chair
Representative Mario Diaz Balart, Ranking Member**

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Chairwoman Norton and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to provide a perspective regarding the recovery efforts, operating posture, lessons learned, and coordinated reimbursement efforts in the National Capital Region (NCR)¹ related to the February snowstorms. I am Dave Kubicek, Acting Deputy General Manager for Operations for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA).

WMATA was created in 1967 as an Interstate Compact agency through enactment of legislation by the U.S. Congress, and by the Commonwealth of Virginia, the State of Maryland, and the District of Columbia. WMATA is the largest public transit provider in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and the second largest subway and sixth largest bus system nationally. "America's Transit System" serves a population of over 3.5 million within a 1,500 square-mile area as well as visitors to our nation's capital from across the country and around the world. During WMATA's most recent fiscal year (July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009), we provided on average 748,000 rail trips, 446,000 bus trips, and 7,000 paratransit trips every weekday. The Metrorail system operates a fleet of approximately 1100 rail cars on a 106-mile system, with 86 stations, and the Metrobus system operates a fleet of more than 1500 buses serving more than 12,000 bus stops along 340 routes in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. The Metro system is critical to the vitality of the region and one that is used every day by federal workers, who make up about 40 percent of Metrorail's rush hour riders.

¹ Title 10, United States Code, Section 2674 (f)(2) provides the following definition:

The term "National Capital Region" means the geographic area located within the boundaries of (A) the District of Columbia, (B) Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in the State of Maryland, (C) Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties and the City of Alexandria in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and (D) all cities and other units of government within the geographic areas of such District, Counties, and City.

During fiscal year 2009, WMATA provided nearly 360 million trips, about 223 million of which were on the rail system, 134 million on Metrobus, and over 2 million with the MetroAccess paratransit service. Over the last three years (FY2007-2009) ridership on the rail system has grown by 15 million annual passenger trips (a 7% increase) and ridership on Metrobus has grown by 2 million annual passenger trips (a 2% increase). MetroAccess ridership has been growing as well, and is up by 43% since 2007.

Consistent with the collaborative nature of the NCR, WMATA has worked together with its state partners to respond to and recover from the February snowstorms. Our recovery efforts are ongoing, and lessons learned are not just associated with WMATA but the NCR as a whole. We share similar concerns regarding reimbursement and, most importantly, an intense commitment to the safety and security of the NCR and its citizens that transcend political boundaries. Moreover, since preparedness, response, and recovery efforts for any disaster require coordination across the region, we are committed to reviewing our response efforts associated with the February snowstorms and implementing lessons learned.

The Subcommittee asked WMATA to answer the following four questions:

1. What is the status of WMATA's recovery efforts from these storms in the National Capital Region?
2. What are the lessons that can be learned from those storms that would apply to future disasters regardless of cause?
3. How does WMATA operate in a disaster?
4. How is WMATA working with FEMA and the jurisdictions in the Region on seeking reimbursement for disaster costs?

**WMATA'S RECOVERY EFFORTS FROM THE DAMAGE ASSOCIATED WITH THE
SNOWSTORMS ARE STILL ONGOING.**

Prior to speaking to WMATA's recovery efforts, I would like to take a moment to discuss WMATA's response efforts associated with the February snowstorms. Snow response operations began days prior to the February 5/6th record-breaking snowstorm with the implementation of WMATA's Severe Weather Plan, which focuses on pre-planning. As we tracked the progress of the impending snowstorm, we prepared both equipment and employees and stockpiled de-icing and salt materials. We stood up our new Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at WMATA headquarters to coordinate our response internally and with our local, state, and Federal partners and participated on the Regional snow calls coordinated by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG). The snow calls, which occurred twice daily, allowed all local, state, and Federal entities within the NCR to be briefed on current and future weather conditions by the National Weather Service and each entity to report on their individual conditions and operational decisions (e.g., are schools or other bus systems open or closed). This facilitated situational awareness of the Region's response efforts and coordinated decision-making.

As the severity of the snowstorm increased so did WMATA's snow response operations. Train and bus operators and emergency personnel were placed on 12-hour shifts, and some stayed at Metro facilities continuously, while others stayed overnight in local hotels. WMATA personnel worked around the clock to clear the rails of snow and ice and operate above ground as long as it was considered safe for passengers and employees. When WMATA's snow commander determined it was unsafe to run rail operations above ground, WMATA ran underground service.

Bus and paratransit vehicles discontinued service once the road conditions in the jurisdictions deteriorated and WMATA's snow commander considered them too dangerous. The rapid deterioration of conditions was exemplified on February 5 when within a single hour approximately 45 buses were temporarily stuck in the snow due to hazardous road conditions.

WMATA continued round-the-clock snow response operations for a period of eight days which started during the February 5/6th snowstorm and continued through the second snowstorm on February 9th. WMATA was able to re-establish above-ground rail operations on February 16 (the day following Presidents Day) for the morning rush hour.

WMATA's recovery efforts continue with additional repairs and maintenance on the rail cars and buses due to the damaging effects of the snow.

WMATA'S LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SNOWSTORMS

WMATA has been able to develop the following list of lessons learned, both positive and negative, from the February snowstorms, which can be applied to future disasters regardless of the cause.

1. WMATA's pre-planning, execution of the Severe Weather Plan, and coordination with the NCR allowed for an effective and coordinated response given the challenging scenario of the two back-to-back snowstorms.
2. WMATA's new Emergency Operations Center proved to be well-designed and comfortable for a week-long activation; however, added technologies and tools could strengthen coordination and decision-making capabilities for WMATA as well as information-sharing to the Region.

3. Operational decisions and suspension of service were predicated on snow conditions and forecasts with the utmost concern for the safety of passengers and employees. Very few incidents of an unsafe nature occurred due to the priority WMATA placed on safety.
4. Bus and paratransit return-to-service was largely dependent upon road conditions, which is directly impacted by jurisdictional snow removal capabilities. In other disaster scenarios, the return-to-service will also be dependent upon debris removal capabilities of the individual jurisdictions.
5. Rail transit return-to-service was dependent upon the ability of WMATA rail employees to clear tracks, yards, and railcars, and to continue priority maintenance services required to run trains safely. Quicker recovery of rail operations could occur if WMATA were to have the equipment and people (in-house or contracted) dedicated to perform such work during a disaster.

TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY DURING A MAJOR DISASTER, WMATA FOLLOWS THE POLICIES ESTABLISHED IN THE NATIONAL RESPONSE FRAMEWORK (NRF) AND THE COMMAND AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OUTLINED IN THE NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.

Incidents typically begin and end locally, and are managed on a daily basis at the lowest possible geographical, organizational, and jurisdictional level. However, there are instances such as the February snowstorms in which successful incident management operations depended on the involvement of all NCR jurisdictions, levels of government, functional agencies, and emergency responder disciplines. These February snowstorms required effective and efficient coordination across this broad spectrum of organizations and activities.

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the National Response Framework (NRF) form the basis of operation in any disaster scenario and have enabled WMATA and the NCR to conduct well-integrated and effective emergency management and incident response operations. The *National Response Framework (NRF)* is a guide to how the Nation conducts all-hazards response. It is built upon scalable, flexible, and adaptable coordinating structures to align key roles and responsibilities across the Nation, linking all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector. The *National Incident Management System (NIMS)* is a companion document that provides standard command and management structures that apply to response activities. This system provides a consistent, nationwide template to enable Federal, State, tribal, and local governments, the private sector, and NGOs to work together to prepare for, prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity.

Emergency management is the function that coordinates and integrates the concepts found in the NRF and the NIMS for all activities necessary to build, sustain, and improve the capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, or mitigate against threatened or actual natural disasters, acts of terrorism, or other manmade disasters. It does this through a core set of concepts, principles, procedures, organizational processes, terminology, and standard requirements applicable to a broad community.

In December 2008, WMATA established an emergency management office within the Metro Transit Police Department. This office has been working to incorporate the principles,

policies, and guidance of both the NRF and NIMS into disaster operations within WMATA. The result has been effective and coordinated response within the NCR, which was exemplified in the response to the February snowstorms as well as the shooting outside the Pentagon Metro last month and the June 22, 2009 crash on the Red Line.

WMATA CONTINUES TO COORDINATE WITH THE STATES ON SEEKING REIMBURSEMENT FOR DISASTER COSTS.

The Governors of Maryland and Virginia and the Mayor of the District of Columbia have submitted a request for disaster declarations associated with the February snowstorms. The jurisdictions which WMATA serves can effectively demonstrate that their capabilities to respond to the snowstorms have been exceeded for both snowstorms and that the estimated public assistance costs, including snow assistance costs within a 48-hour period, exceed the county per capita cost threshold required for a major disaster declaration.

The jurisdictions must also effectively demonstrate they have met record snowfall levels or within 90% of the record. The current question is if the February 9/10 snowstorm will qualify if the new record snowfall level equates to the level of the February 5/6 storm. If the February 9/10 snowstorm does not meet record snowfall levels, only one 48-hour contiguous period for snow response costs can be claimed for reimbursement purposes, according to the revised FEMA snow policy dated November 2009. This will result in potential reimbursement of only a fraction of the snow response costs for WMATA, and does not include the additional \$10 million in lost revenue which is not considered by FEMA to be an eligible cost for reimbursement.

Recoupment of the entire cost associated with WMATA's snow response activities would require a change in FEMA's snow policy. Based on the combined magnitude of the February snowstorms and continuing snow recovery efforts, we expect that the region will strongly request that FEMA consider drafting disaster declarations which would allow all snow response activities to be considered for reimbursement for an extended period of time, i.e., February 5 through February 16. This timeframe reflects the period in which most local jurisdictions, along with WMATA, were performing snow response activities and realized any infrastructure damage.

WMATA staff is working to make certain that WMATA will be able to submit reimbursement requests for eligible work under the individual states' disaster declarations. Based on the criteria above, WMATA continues to capture all snow response and recovery costs and has also broken down expenses for two 48-hour periods associated with the February 5-6 and February 9-10 snowstorms. Initial estimates for snow response activities and associated documentation for the timeframe of February 5th through 16th have been submitted to all three States and delivered to FEMA Region III for review. WMATA is currently working to calculate complete costs, which will include not only operational expenses incurred during the snowstorm, but will also cover damage sustained to equipment, facilities, and infrastructure during the storms as well as post-storm cleanup efforts and delays to capital programs. WMATA intends to continue its close coordination with FEMA and the individual States throughout the reimbursement process.

CONCLUSION

I appreciate the Subcommittee's interest in the response and recovery efforts, lessons learned, and status of reimbursement associated with the February snowstorms. I want to emphasize again the integration and cooperation that occurred within the NCR in response to these snowstorms. That cooperation is continuing, and we join with others in the region in urging the President to draft state declarations that allow for full cost recovery. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.